

## PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

*Public Admin. Dev.* 37, 3–14 (2017)Published online in Wiley Online Library  
(wileyonlinelibrary.com) DOI: 10.1002/pad.1789

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: “CONCEPTUALIZING EFFECTIVE SOCIAL POLICY DESIGN: DESIGN SPACES AND CAPACITY CHALLENGES”

NAMRATA CHINDARKAR\*, MICHAEL HOWLETT AND M RAMESH

*National University of Singapore, Singapore*

## SUMMARY

This article addresses the rise of design thinking and its problematics in the social policy sphere. In particular, it argues that studies of social policy design, like all design work in policymaking, must differentiate more carefully between technical and political considerations in public policymaking and examine the implications each process has for the content of social policy design, its implementation, and its prospects of success or failure. The article develops a model of social policy formulation spaces based on the extent to which policies are intended to address technical or political problems and a government's capacity to engage in policy analysis and alternative assessment. This model is applied in the articles in this special issue to help understand the patterns of policy content and outcome success and failure found in this sector across multiple jurisdictions and issue areas. Copyright © 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

KEY WORDS—policy design; policy capacity; social policy; Asia

## INTRODUCTION: THE (MISSING) EMPIRICS OF SOCIAL POLICY DESIGN

Social policies are the result of efforts made by governments to alter aspects of their own or public behavior in order to carry out some end or purpose they consider important. Perhaps a gaping hole in social policymaking is the lack of attention given to “global pragmatics and future problematics” (Angelides and Caiden, 1994). These refer to changing current realities, emerging trends, complexities, and future uncertainties in the policy sphere. In recent years, social policymaking has rapidly evolved and is no longer restricted to achieving singular purposes such as social protection, provision of health and education, or increasing civil society engagement. It is increasingly integrated and engages multiple levels of public administration and spans across multiple sectors. It is also dynamic and context specific in that it comprises complex arrangements of social goals and policy means that have arisen at different points in time and in different locations through processes of policy formulation unique to each jurisdiction and government (Howlett and Cashore, 2009). Policymakers therefore need to take a fundamentally different approach to policy formulation—one that consciously “designs” social policies to balance practical and political challenges (which may pull policy means in opposite directions) while continuously evolving over time and adapting to different contexts. In designing successful social policies, it is also imperative to enhance policy capacity so as to avoid short-sighted and one-dimensional policies (Angelides and Caiden, 1994). The need for balanced social policy backed by necessary capacity is of significance in both developed and developing countries, where social policy challenges are many and the resources available to meet them scarce.

In the policy sciences, concepts of policy “design” have been linked to the study of both the policy instruments used to implement policy and the formulation of programs and packages of such tools intended to address social and political problems (May, 2003; Howlett, 2014). In their many works on the subject in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Linder and Peters (1988) argued that the actual process of public policy decision-making could, in an

---

\*Correspondence to: N. Chindarkar, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, Singapore. E-mail: [namrata.chindarkar@nus.edu.sg](mailto:namrata.chindarkar@nus.edu.sg)

analytical sense, be divorced from the abstract concept of policy design, in the same way that an abstract architectural concept can be divorced from its engineering manifestation in theory, if not in practice.

Such a distinction, they argued, allowed policy designs to be separated conceptually from policy designing and allowed the development within policy studies of a design orientation (Schön, 1988, 1992). In this view, policy design involves the effort to more or less systematically develop efficient and effective policies through the application of knowledge about policy means gained from experience and reason, to the development and adoption of courses of action that are likely to succeed in attaining their desired goals or aims within specific policy contexts (Bobrow and Dryzek, 1987; Bobrow, 2006; Montpetit, 2003). But exactly what constitutes a design, what makes one successful, what makes one design better than another, and how do design processes differ from other formulation techniques and activities? These are important questions, and attempts to answer them have animated design studies in the policy sciences over the past half century.

Studies of policy formulation, in particular, have addressed the impact of policy ideas and advice on alternative specification and policy creation and have distinguished between design processes that are largely “technical” or problem oriented and those that are more “partisan” or politically oriented (Linder and Peters, 1990a; Craft and Howlett, 2012). Several processes of policy formulation have been uncovered in these studies, ranging from bargaining to partisan electoral maneuvering. “Design” is usually thought to exist at one end of a spectrum ranging from contingent “non-design” to more precise instrumental efforts to match problems and solutions (Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014).

Policy design, in this sense, is a specific form of policy formulation based on the gathering of knowledge about the effects of policy tool use on policy targets and the application of that knowledge to the development and implementation of policies aimed at the attainment of desired policy objectives (Bobrow, 2006; Bobrow and Dryzek, 1987; Montpetit, 2003; Weaver, 2009, 2010). It involves the deliberate and conscious attempt to define policy goals and connect them in an instrumental fashion to tools expected to realize those objectives (Gilabert and Lawford-Smith, 2012; Majone, 1975; May, 2003). Each of the three main alternative formulation processes is discussed later.

*Problem-centered policy design* consists of considering alternative arrangements deemed potentially capable of resolving or addressing some aspect of a policy problem, one or more of which is ultimately put into practice. Much existing work on policy design adopts this orientation uncritically and advocates or desires policymaking to take on this complexion (Tribe, 1972). Such a problem-centered policymaking process is, of course, only one possible orientation or set of practices that can be followed in actual policy formulation (Colebatch, 1998; Tribe, 1972). Policy formulators may base their analyses on logic, knowledge, and experience but also upon purely political calculations that can also serve to generate alternatives (Bendor *et al.*, 2009; Sidney, 2007). Indeed, *politically centered policy design* is a staple of policymaking in democracies and non-democracies alike. Although such situations are well known in political science, they have not been well studied in the policy sciences, and the extent to which considerations such as political gain or blame avoidance calculations outweigh instrumental factors in policy formulation is a key empirical question (Hood, 2010) that studies of social policymaking such as those presented in this special issue help to illuminate.

Policy design, understood in this broad sense, overlaps and straddles policy formulation, decision-making, and policy implementation and involves actors, ideas, and interests active at each stage of the policy process (Howlett *et al.*, 2009). However, it also posits a very specific form of interaction among these elements, driven by knowledge and evidence of the potential and limitations of alternatives in achieving policy and political goals.

Both the aforementioned kinds of design processes can be performed either well or poorly. Why this is the case and the factors that lead to one outcome rather than another are addressed later. Both, however, are quite different from a third formulation process—*non-design*—which refers to policymaking bereft of either a problem or politically centered instrumental design logic. That is, while many policies contain some instrumental intention or result from some effort to consciously match means and goals in a design process, in other circumstances, policy decisions will be more highly contingent and “irrational”, that is, driven by situational logics and opportunism rather than careful deliberation and assessment (Cohen *et al.*, 1979; Dryzek, 1983; Kingdon, 1984; Eijlander, 2005; Franchino and Hoyland, 2009).

This occurs when policymakers are unable to understand a problem and specify its root causes or when they take decisions and assess alternatives based on random or highly contingent processes that can involve activities such as bargaining or horse trading, which fail to approximate the “search” strategies behind more instrumental problem and politically related policy activity (Lindblom, 1955; Cohen *et al.*, 1972, 1979). In such formulation and decision processes, design considerations may be more or less absent, and the quality of the logical or empirical relations between policy components as solutions to problems may be incorrect or ignored (Cohen *et al.*, 1979; Dryzek, 1983; Eijlander, 2005; Franchino and Hoyland, 2009; Kingdon, 1984; Sager and Rielle, 2013).

While this is clear enough conceptually, very little is actually known about the empirics of many important aspects of formulation work in public policymaking, including who is engaged in policy design and non-design efforts and why one process would emerge rather than another (deLeon, 1992; Sidney, 2007; Schneider and Sidney, 2009). This is especially the case concerning the nature of the kinds of the “design” activities that go into policy formulation and implementation as well as how common such efforts are compared with the pursuit of less instrumental kinds of policy formulation processes.

This high level of contingency found in some decision-making contexts has led some critics and observers of policy design efforts to suggest that policies cannot be “designed” in the sense that a house or a piece of furniture can be (Dryzek and Ripley, 1988; deLeon, 1988) and to argue that non-design processes dominate policymaking (Cohen *et al.*, 1972, 1979). However, this opinion is not universally shared or endorsed (Mucciaroni, 1992). On the contrary, it is often suggested that most if not all policies are carefully crafted to ensure that policy means are capable of achieving policy goals in a relatively cost-efficient manner and that exceptions to this rule are rare and can be eliminated (Packwood, 2002; Kay, 2011).

Some of this disagreement is philosophical in nature (Tribe, 1972; Nelson, 1977; Forester, 1983; Dery, 1984), but to a very great extent, many of these disagreements are the result of a poor record of empirical studies into the subjects of policy design and formulation. That is, as Junginger (2013) put it, despite many years of study, we actually know very little about “the actual activities of designing that bring policies into being—of how people involved in the creation of policies go about identifying design problems and design criteria, about the methods they employ in their design process” (p. 3).

This observation is true of policy design in general but is especially acute in the design of social policies, which are major areas of government spending and action with a long history dating back over several centuries (Esping-Andersen, 1990). In this sector in particular, there is a strong need to better understand the mechanics of policy formulation involved in developing policy alternatives in addressing social problems and the extent to which they are influenced or follow the rubrics of “design thinking” (Linder and Peters, 1988; Wintges, 2007; Bason, 2014; Brown and Wyatt, 2010).

In order to address this and other issues related to “good” and “poor” design, the articles in this special issue are devoted to the careful study of empirical cases of social policy formulation in several jurisdictions and to the examination of the relationships existing between the design processes followed in each case and the ultimate success or failure of the policy initiatives examined.

## SOCIAL POLICY DESIGN AS A FIELD OF STUDY

Conceptually, an instrumentally oriented policy design process begins with an assessment of the abilities of different policy tools to affect policy outputs and outcomes and the kinds of resources required to allow them to operate as intended (Hood, 1986; Salamon, 2002). As Linder and Peters (1991) noted, this kind of activity is a “spatial” or contextual one. That is, it is

a systematic activity composed of a series of choices ... design solutions, then, will correspond to a set of possible locations in a design space ... this construction emphasizes not only the potential for generating new mixtures of conventional solutions, but also the importance of giving careful attention to tradeoffs among design criteria when considering instrument choices (p. 130).

Instrumental knowledge is contextual in the sense that it requires a special understanding of how the use of specific kinds of instruments affects target group behavior and compliance with government aims (Weaver, 2009a, 2009b, 2013, 2015). It thus includes knowledge and consideration of many constraints on tool use originating in the limits of existing knowledge, prevailing governance structures, and other arrangements and behaviors that may preclude consideration of certain options and promote others (Howlett, 2009a, 2011). It requires both analytical and evidentiary capacity on the part of the government as well as the intention to exercise it.

In contrast to those scholars who view policymaking as intentional and instrumentally rational, many commentators, pundits, and jaded and cynical members of the public often assume that all policymaking is driven by politics and hence is more or less irrational and involved in various processes of non-design. However, while it may not be problem centered, politics-centered design is very much still design, in the instrumental sense of the term, although its purpose is to advance the interest of powerful stakeholders rather than to solve policy problems.

Indeed, politics has been one of the primary determinants of social policy choices since at least the French Revolution, as governments increasingly realized that they needed popular support in order to retain office (Flora and Heidenheimer, 1981; Overbye, 1994). Bismarck, for example, established health and pension programs in the German Empire in the 1870s to undercut growing support for socialist parties among the working class (Rimlinger, 1971) and only secondarily to perfect a solution to the problem of aging and income decline. Similarly, the spread of democratization further deepened the role of politics in policymaking, especially in the area of social security (Amenta and Carruthers, 1988; Myles, 1989). Governments throughout the world, from Europe to Latin America, heightened their social welfare efforts in response to the spread of trade unions and the electoral success of the political parties affiliated with them (Korpi, 1980; Shalev, 1983; Myles, 1989). It is arguable that politics has always been an integral part, and a primary determinant, of major social policy decisions. This phenomenon has to be dealt with in any study of social policy design.

There are also, as mentioned previously, situations in which social policy formulation is driven neither by instrumental problem solving nor socio-political concerns, a phenomenon and policy formulation space that can be described as “non-design”. This includes a variety of contexts in which social policy formulators or decision-makers engage in interest-driven trade-offs or log rolling between different values or resource uses, often in response to concerns about legislative expediency. In other circumstances, a non-design situation can emerge when policymakers engage in venal or corrupt behavior in which personal gain from a decision may trump other evaluative and decision-making criteria. Social policy measures that serve symbolic, rather than practical technical or political, purposes are another example of such non-design. The most pervasive outcome and indicator of such dynamics, however, are the fine tuning of existing social policy elements and programs simply because they are a part of a welfare regime and hence are open to manipulation, regardless of their (ir)relevance to contemporary realities and needs (Bode, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 1990).

## POLICY DESIGN SPACES AND THEIR IMPACT ON POLICY PROCESSES

Understanding which formulation process is likely to unfold or has unfolded is the key to understanding whether or not a design process is present and, if so, whether or not it is likely to generate a good or poor design effort.

That is, the design of successful policies requires thinking about policymaking in such a way as to fully take into account the dual purposes—both technical/problem and political—that policies can serve and the extent to which efforts to attain those ends are adequately resourced and capable, that is, to understand its “design space” (Hillier *et al.*, 1972; Hillier and Leaman, 1974; Gero, 1990). As we have seen, a very important aspect of such spaces concerns the general intention of government in enacting policy. Much of the old design literature, as noted previously, focused attention only upon “technical” analysis, that is, upon efforts to assess the functional potential of specific tools (Howlett, 2014). The new design literature keeps this focus but has added to it the need to also assess other factors, especially political ones.

“Designers” must avoid simply advocating “stock” solutions unless this is called for by the limited nature of the space available for new designs (May, 1981; Helms *et al.*, 1993). Rather, they should consider the range of feasible options possible in a given circumstance and package these into sets of competing strategies to achieve policy goals

(May, 1981: p. 236, 238). Different policy spaces exist depending on how prominent technical and political concerns are, and these spaces condition what kind of process is followed. As Weimer (1992) has noted, “instruments, alone or in combination, must be crafted to fit particular substantive, organizational, and political contexts” (p. 373).

An optimal situation in public policy formulation is one wherein the interests and aims of both politicians and technical analysts and advisors are congruent and policymakers seek to attain both policy and political objectives through the same tools. While policymakers both within and outside the government are multi-dimensional creatures with varied needs, political survival is a major concern that leads them to make policies to garner political support for their election or re-election as well as to solve public problems (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014). The health insurance program launched by the Thaksin government in Thailand in 2001 is an example of such a program: It extended insurance coverage to the entire population while reducing total health expenditures at the same time as it won the government the subsequent election (Ramesh, 2008).

As Figure 1 shows, other kinds of policy design spaces are also very possible. In those other spaces, either one or the other goal is missing or contested. As a result, policy processes other than the effective and legitimated ones found in an optimal design space are likely to emerge.

That is, the nature of the design space that is present as policy formulation occurs has a significant influence on the kind of policy process likely to unfold and ultimately upon the likelihood that well-crafted policies will emerge—policies that are effective in the sense of addressing the problem at affordable cost while being both legitimate and popular with the population and government. Such policies are likely to emerge only when both political and policy objectives are pursued simultaneously and in tandem.

Pursuit of political objectives unaccompanied by intention to solve a policy problem may be described as “populist” policymaking that focuses on “valence” issues, which may or may not be susceptible to effective action (such as fighting crime). Measures that seek to address problems regardless of political implications may be described as “technocratic” policymaking, which can easily generate politically infeasible options (such as raising taxes to increase welfare budgets to deal with homelessness). In situations where neither political nor technical concerns are salient or when policymakers are pressured to adopt contradictory positions because of conflicting political and/or technical demands, policymaking may be paralyzed or result in ineffective or damaging policies.

		<b>Political Goals</b>	
		<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Less Important</i>
<b>Technical/Problem-Centered Concerns</b>	<i>Very Important</i>	<b>Optimal Design Space</b>  <i>High profile policymaking which features both technical and political considerations</i>  Effective Policymaking Combining Technical and Political Considerations	<b>Technical Design Space</b>  <i>Legal-technical policymaking which may consider weakly legitimated or politically infeasible options</i>  Technocratic Policymaking
	<i>Less Important</i>	<b>Political Design Space</b>  <i>Valence/electorally driven policymaking which may consider technically infeasible options</i>  Populist Policymaking	<b>Sub-Optimal Design Space</b>  <i>Low profile policymaking which excels at neither political nor technical analysis</i>  Contested and Ineffective Policymaking

Figure 1. Policy design spaces and process implications.



### WHY ADOPT A DESIGN THINKING APPROACH TO SOCIAL POLICY?

Policy formulation hence can occupy one or more of several distinct design spaces, from purely instrumental technical design to purely symbolic non-design. How and when a particular policy can be found in a particular space and how and when it can move across spaces is a major area of concern in the field. For example, aid agencies and others have long grappled with the question of how a corrupt process of non-design can change to a more technical problem-centered one (Treisman, 2007; Dahlström *et al.*, 2013).

In general, the effort to understand this question in the social policy realm has suffered as social policy continues in many circles to be viewed as a “residual” part of public policymaking, disjointed from “mainstream” economic policies, despite the fact that social policies account for the bulk of public spending in most countries. This attitude has led social policy design to be viewed by many as simply a political tool molded arbitrarily to serve vested interests, often to the detriment of public expenditure and social well-being. However, ballooning public expenditures, coupled with budget deficits in many countries and growing public distrust in governments, are making it imperative for policymakers to approach social policy formulation more systematically. This has led to a re-consideration of its status and a re-emphasis on understanding the actual practices of policy formulation followed in this sector.

Social problems have become a more clear and present challenge in both developed and developing countries. Volatile economies, rising inequality, changing demographics, humanitarian crises, and changing environmental conditions are posing new challenges and creating complex social problems (Yi, 2015). Further, countries around the world are becoming more problem centered and aware and are demanding effective solutions to social problems and injustices (Brezinski, 2005), forcing governments to improve their policy performance.

This increasing complexity of social problems and concerns has led many governments to attempt to adopt a more systematic and integrated approach to social policy rather than the bandaid approach of incremental changes or the siloed policy patchwork that existed in the past. For example, social problems such as elderly care require coordination between the health sector, labor market, and the pension system, among others. Such an integrated design approach, with a systematic mixing of policy instruments rather than *ad hoc* layering, is more likely to result in optimal outcomes.

Further, governments may need to creatively craft social policies to address the multi-faceted issues they now face. An example of such design thinking might be a design orientation that consciously targets equity as well as efficiency through consumption and behavioral changes (Brown and Wyatt, 2010). This may require a tool that intermeshes social policy and social regulation. While regulation has been a traditional policy instrument for addressing market failures, it is of little use when addressing failures in providing social goods such as education, health care, and housing (Wu and Ramesh, 2014). However, to address equity and efficiency in the provision of social goods, it may be necessary to undertake social regulation design that would impose certain choices on consumers, especially where governments believe that the consumption is sub-optimal.

With increasing political awareness, the knowledge aspect of design is also gaining significance in the social policy arena. Governments are increasingly expected to crowdsource inputs and use evidence from the government, the public, and experts, especially where citizens have a direct stake in formulating policy (Garcia Martinez, 2015; Linders, 2012). As citizens get more informed and demand better governance, these capabilities may quickly become the norm.

### CAPACITY ISSUES IN POLICY DESIGN: UNDERSTANDING DESIGN DYNAMICS

Transforming intentions into practice is a complex process, and many noble efforts of policymakers fail because of lack of capacity for designing effective policies. Policy design—in the social policy sphere and all others—is most productive when the government enjoys legitimacy and broad political support. Design will be strong or weak depending on the organizational and analytical competences that governments possess to formulate and implement their policy preferences.

This suggests that within the current setting of changing social problems, political expectations, and policy technologies, balancing political and technical objectives is only part of the policy design challenge. A second enabling condition is required for effective social policy designs to emerge from policy formulation activity: the policy capacity to allow a government to acquire and process the information and knowledge required to conduct a sophisticated policy analysis of problems and alternatives. This second factor—policy capacity—is the one that determines whether or not the process ultimately generates a strong or a weak design.

Conducive design spaces are a necessary but not sufficient condition for effective design to occur. Governments must have more than just the room or space to engage in policy design; they must also have the capability to do so in an effective way on the ground.

Policy capacity in this sense refers to the governance and organization-analytical capacity of the government (Wu *et al.*, 2015; Howlett and Ramesh, 2015): the sets of skills, competences, resources, and institutional arrangements and capabilities with which key tasks and functions in the policy process are structured, staffed, and supported.

In order to design effective policies, governments need to enjoy or create the conditions necessary for their formulation. While there are many types of policy capabilities, broadly speaking, it is the relevant agencies' analytical capacity and the system-wide political and managerial capacity that shape policymakers' capacity to set and achieve policy goals (Wu *et al.*, 2015).

The extent to which the actors involved in the policy process are able to carry out their functions depends on an agency's data collection and analysis capabilities; storage and dissemination of operational information such as client needs, service utilization, budget and human resources; and, increasingly, e-government infrastructure and access to policy advisory services in and out of government. Intra-agency and inter-agency cooperation and coordination also affect the analytical capacity of governments.

A government's policy formulation capacity is also crucially affected by system-wide political capabilities evident in the level of support and trust a public agency enjoys from its political masters and from the society at large, as well as the nature of the economic and security systems within which policymakers operate (Woo *et al.*, 2015). Political trust is vital because agencies and managers must be considered legitimate in order to access resources from their authorizing institutions and constituencies on a continuing basis. To be able to define goals and choose the best instrument for the job, the concerned policymakers and their respective agencies need to enjoy the trust of their target population as well as other relevant agencies within the government. Without this trust and legitimacy, policymakers will lack the information necessary to devise effective policies and, more importantly, carry them out.

		Level of Governance (Political and Operational) Capacity	
		High	Low
Level of Analytical Capacity	High	<b>Capable design</b> <i>Effective policies are possible</i>	<b>Poor political design</b> <i>Good technical designs may be weakly supported</i>
	Low	<b>Capable political design</b> <i>Good political designs are possible which may be technically poor</i>	<b>Poor design</b> <i>Only ineffective and poorly supported policies are possible</i>

Figure 2. Capacity issues in policy design outcomes.

Agencies' analytical competences allow the members involved in the policy process to identify and understand policy problems, canvass for solutions, assess alternatives based on comparative assessment, and evaluate the impacts of chosen policies (Howlett, 2009, 2015). The latter two dimensions can be termed a government's "governance capacity" as they relate to and determine the state's ability to affect and alter its own and social behavior towards its own ends.

Figure 2 suggests that within each of the design spaces set out in Figure 1, four possibilities exist. Even in an optimal design situation, effective policies can emerge only if governments possess high levels of governance capacity as well as a high level of analytical capability. Conversely, the absence of both types of capabilities allows only for weak design efforts and increases the probability of ineffective policies emerging from this process.

### CAPACITY ISSUES IN SOCIAL POLICY DESIGN

Awareness of this second area of concern relating to policy capacity has been less manifested in scholarship on social policy, which has largely evaded discussions on the difficulties involved in making social policy. To the extent that social policy research does address practical policy issues, it has typically focussed on assessing the nature and magnitude of social problems (in the social work or economics domains), assessing implementation experiences (a public administration domain), or analyzing the political and institutional determinants of policy choices and outcomes (a political science domain). It is time for social policy scholars to begin to focus on policy design issues in order to better understand what policymakers should and can do in which circumstances.

Social problems are typically multi-faceted and intertwined; rooted in a diverse range of individual, social and economic conditions, and ideological and religious predilections; and often highly politicized. This places great demands on governments. Successful policy design in such environments requires a high level of policy capacity that may not exist, for example, the construction of bundles or packages of tools over time that attempt to simultaneously address multiple goals in overlapping and multi-level and multi-sector contexts (Bode, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Poverty alleviation, for instance, requires different programs for different types of poverty and its varied underlying causes: conditional and unconditional cash transfers, tax assistance for those in marginal employment, labor training, and so on.

Moreover, social policies often deal with more intractable problems in the context of poor knowledge of causal relations and poorly funded and resource-poor organizations, while the solutions proposed touch on deeply held normative and ideological or religious values and beliefs that inhibit formulation and implementation efforts at the systemic level. Popular perception, and not just substance, is more important for social policy than for many other policy areas because social policies touch on substantial portions of the population—either because individuals have to pay for the costs of such policies in their taxes or because they receive benefits, or both.

For those favoring more problem-focused technocratic policies, the worst situation is a politicized, religious, or ideologically driven policy process, employed by low-capacity policymakers for short-term legislative or other purposes regardless of its impact on the problem at hand. More common is the politicized space where high-capacity politicians make spending commitments for electoral gains, while more effective solutions are ignored. In other situations, a positive design space exists, and policymakers' analytical and organizational capacities are high enough to allow them to undertake complex problem-solving tasks. In yet other instances, the same kind of space may exist, but policymakers lack the political trust and legitimacy with key stakeholders and the population at large to undertake technically effective or efficient solutions; as a result, they make technocratic choices that fail to achieve their full potential. In addition, the operations and effectiveness of the tools are affected by surrounding social, political, and economic conditions. As we have seen, a weak policy space undermines an intentional policy design orientation. In combination with weak capacity, this can drive design efforts into the bottom right quadrant of Figure 1, resulting in poor design.

The capacity constraints may be so strong that the ultimate design of social policies is only distantly related to solving the originally highlighted problem. When policy tools are used in combination, as is often the case in social policy, or when they are layered on top of earlier tools, for example, there are additional complexities that promote



synergies and complementarities but also allow for contradictions and conflicts in expected and unexpected ways. Only a high level of policy capacity can predict and avoid these situations (Howlett and Rayner, 2007).

## CONCLUSION AND STRUCTURE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Solving difficult social problems has meant that social policymaking needs to continually evolve and innovate in order to address new and older problems in changing circumstances. But while having a design orientation is useful in this regard, it is difficult if not impossible to design in a poor design space or when governments lack requisite competences and capabilities and hence the capacity to design effectively. Successful design will require a shift from a poor political non-design space to one more favorable to successful action; in many cases, this also requires an improvement in policy capacity that may not be forthcoming.

Capacity improvements are thus a *sine qua non* for many improvements in social policy formulation. This is because design in complex multi-actor multi-level situations requires more than just an understanding of the problem at hand, the features of the tools relevant to addressing them, and how they operate when used individually and in combination with other tools. It also requires the organizational and systemic resources and support that allow those individual-level skills and competences to be exercised.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many approaches to social policy reform around the globe focus on building capacity for better policy design through decentralization and the creation of closer operational links between national and sub-national or regional and sub-regional actors. As Figure 1 has shown, however, this in itself is not enough if a government wishes to alter existing practices in a more systematic and instrumental fashion. Such a shift also requires the adoption of a design orientation towards social policymaking, moving the formulation space towards the upper two quadrants.

This special issue addresses the differences between more, and less, problem-centered policy formulation and decision processes and the likelihood and reasons for each occurring, both in general and a social policy context. By undertaking a discussion of the intention to engage in policy design, the special issue develops and applies various models of formulation processes and policy design spaces in specific cases selected by the authors. These cases help assess the nature of the formulation processes that can exist between ideal instrumental and problem-solution-driven policy design and other more political and less intentional processes. They demonstrate the integrated nature of social policy design that engages multiple levels of public administration and spans across multiple sectors. The articles in the issue explore each of these issues in detail, bridging the gap between policy theory and social policy practice.

The articles in this special issue are organized into three sections. The first two papers, which examine social enterprise policy in South Korea and the contracting out of social services in China, reveal that good policy design alone is not enough to ensure effectiveness, especially in the longer term. They emphasize the role of non-state actors in effective social policy design. In their article, M. Jae Moon and TaeHyung Kim examine how Korea's Social Enterprise Promotion Act of 2007 affects these enterprises' social and economic performance. The authors conclude that although the policy design positively affects social performance, its long-term effectiveness depends not just on good policy but on a more mature civil society.

Wen Zhuoyi's contribution looks at the policy intent of contracting out social services in China and studies two local experiments with contracting out in Guangdong province that present different models of design thinking and focus. While the experiments in Guangdong and Shenzhen increased the number of social organizations and are considered to be successful, they also reveal a number of problems with contracting out, including insufficient competition, the potential for collusion, and de-professionalization of social work—difficulties that are particularly acute in the context of China's emerging welfare state.

The next contribution focuses on the dynamics of policy design with an emphasis on balancing multi-sector objectives. Namrata Chindarkar's study of Gujarat, India's rural electrification policy argues that the design and implementation of the policy were as much problem driven as it was politically motivated. A top-down, outcome-based approach enabled Gujarat's scheme to be implemented in record time and within available means.

It also illustrates how rural development, infrastructure, and agricultural policies are closely integrated and require a careful design approach.

The final two papers complement the multi-sector policy design approach and tackle efforts to improve policy design through the lens of health policy and urban–rural integration in China. Azad Singh Bali and M. Ramesh develop a schema of regulatory, fiscal, informational, and organizational tools that can be employed to achieve effective health care. The paper highlights the use, misuse, and non-use of these specific tools in China from the 1970s to the present to shed light on viable health policy reforms.

Qian Jiwei's contribution looks at China's efforts to equalize access to public services between urban and rural residents. An urban–rural integration pilot program undertaken in Chongqing was especially successful in relieving fiscal constraints, and some of the policies in the Chongqing pilot have subsequently been taken up by the central government. Despite the successes, the policy faces a number of institutional constraints. Further study will be required to determine whether and how such a policy can be successfully transferred to other areas of China.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank participants at the “International Workshop on Social Policy: Formulation and Design in Comparative Perspective” for their helpful comments. We are grateful for the financial support offered by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

## REFERENCES

- Amenta E, Carruthers BG. 1988. The formative years of us social spending policies: theories of the welfare state and the American states during the great depression. *American Sociological Review* **53**: 661–678.
- Angelides C, Caiden G. 1994. Adjusting policy-thinking to global pragmatics and future problematics. *Public Administration and Development* **14**: 223–239.
- Bason C. 2014. *Design for Policy* New edition. Farnham, Surrey, Gower Pub Co: Burlington, VT.
- Bendor J, Kumar S, Siegel DA. 2009. Satisficing: a ‘pretty good’ heuristic. *The B.E. Journal of Theoretical Economics* **9**: 1. DOI:10.2202/1935-1704.1478.
- Bobrow D. 2006. Policy design: ubiquitous, necessary and difficult. In *Handbook of Public Policy*, Peters BG, Pierre J (eds). SAGE; 75–96.
- Bobrow DB, Dryzek JS. 1987. *Policy Analysis by Design*. University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh.
- Bode I. 2006. Disorganized welfare mixes: voluntary agencies and new governance regimes in Western Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy* **16**(4): 346–359.
- Brezinski Z. 2005. *The Dilemma of the Last Sovereign*. The American Interest.
- Brown, Tim, and Jocelyn Wyatt. “Design thinking for social innovation (SSIR).” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* Winter (2010).
- Cohen M, March J, Olsen J. 1972. A garbage can model of organizational choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly* **17**(1): 1–25.
- Cohen MD, March JG, Olsen JP. 1979. People, problems, solutions and the ambiguity of relevance. In *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations*. Universitetsforlaget: Bergen; 24–37.
- Colebatch HK. 1998. *Policy*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- Craft J, Howlett M. 2012. Policy formulation, governance shifts and policy influence: location and content in policy advisory systems. *Journal of Public Policy* **32**(02): 79–98.
- Dahlström C, Lindvall J, Rothstein B. 2013. Corruption, bureaucratic failure and social policy priorities. *Political Studies* **61**(3): 523–542.
- deLeon P. 1988. The Contextual Burdens of Policy Design. *Policy Studies Journal* **17**(2): 297–310.
- deLeon P. 1992. Policy formulation: where ignorant armies clash by night. *Policy Studies Review* **11** 3/4: 389–405.
- Dery D. 1984. *Problem Definition in Policy Analysis*. University of Kansas: Lawrence.
- Dryzek J. 1983. Don't toss coins in garbage cans: a prologue to policy design. *Journal of Public Policy* **3**(4): 345–367.
- Dryzek JS, Ripley B. 1988. The ambitions of policy design. *Policy Studies Review* **7**(4): 705–719.
- Eijlander P. 2005. Possibilities and constraints in the use of self-regulation and co-regulation in legislative policy: experiences in the Netherlands —lessons to be learned for the EU. *Electronic Journal of Comparative Law* **9**(1): 1–8.
- Esping-Andersen G. 1990. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Polity Press.
- Flora P, Heidenheimer AJ (eds). 1981. *The Development of Welfare States in Europe and America*. Transaction Books: New Brunswick.
- Forester J. 1983. What analysts do. In *Values, Ethics and the Practice of Policy Analysis*, Dunn WN (ed). Lexington Books: Lexington; 47–62.
- Franchino F, Hoyland B. 2009. Legislative involvement in parliamentary systems: opportunities, conflict and institutional constraints. *American Political Science Review* **103**(4): 607–621.
- Gero, John S. “Design prototypes: a knowledge representation schema for design.” *Text.Serial.Journal*, December 15, 1990.
- Gilabert P, Lawford-Smith H. 2012. Political feasibility: a conceptual exploration. *Political Studies* **60**(4): 809–825.
- Helms LB, Kurt SB, Henkin AB. 1993. Assuring failure: implementation design and policy environment of a federal program provision. *The American Review of Public Administration* **23**(3): 263–277.
- Hillier B, Leaman A. 1974. How is design possible: a sketch for a theory. *DMG-DRS Journal: Design Research and Methods* **8**(1): 40–50.

- Hillier B, Musgrave J, O'Sullivan P. 1972. Knowledge and design. In *Environmental Design: Research and Practice*, Mitchell WJ (ed). University of California-Los Angeles: Los Angeles; 29.3.1–29.3.14.
- Hood C. 1986. *The Tools of Government*. Chatham House Publishers: Chatham.
- Hood C. 2010. *The Blame Game: Spin, Bureaucracy, and Self-preservation in Government*. Princeton University Press.
- Howlett M. 2009. Policy analytical capacity and evidence-based policymaking: lessons from Canada. *Canadian Public Administration* **52**(2): 153–175.
- Howlett M. 2009a. Governance modes, policy regimes and operational plans: a multi-level nested model of policy instrument choice and policy design. *Policy Sciences* **42**: 73–89.
- Howlett M. 2011. *Designing Public Policies: Principles and Instruments*. Routledge: New York.
- Howlett M. 2014. From the 'old' to the 'new' policy design: design thinking beyond markets and collaborative governance. *Policy Sciences* **47**(3): 187–207.
- Howlett, M, "Policy analytical capacity" in *Policy & Society* 2015 forthcoming
- Howlett M, Cashore B. 2009. The dependent variable problem in the study of policy change: understanding policy change as a methodological problem. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* **11**(1): 33–46.
- Howlett M, Mukherjee I. 2014. Policy design and non-design: towards a spectrum of policy formulation types. *Politics and Governance* **2**(2): 57–71.
- Howlett, Michael, and M. Ramesh. Achilles' heels of governance: critical capacity deficits and their role in governance failures: the Achilles heel of governance. *Regulation & Governance*, 2015
- Howlett M, Rayner J. 2007. Design principles for policy mixes: cohesion and coherence in 'new governance arrangements'. *Policy and Society* **26**(4): 1–18.
- Howlett M, Ramesh M, Perl A. 2009. *Studying Public Policy*. Oxford University Press: Canada.
- Junginger, Sabine. (2013). "Design and innovation in the public sector: matters of design in policymaking and policy implementation" 10<sup>th</sup> European Academy of Design Conference—Crafting the Future
- Kay A. 2011. Evidence based policy making: the elusive search for rational public administration. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* **70**(3): 236–245.
- Kingdon JW. 1984. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Little, Brown: Boston.
- Korpi W. 1980. Social policy and distributional conflict in capitalist democracies. *West European Politics* **3**: 296–316.
- Lindblom CE. 1955. *Bargaining: The Hidden Hand in Government*. Rand Corporation: Los Angeles.
- Linder SH, Peters BG. 1988. The analysis of design or the design of analysis? *Policy Studies Review* **7**(4): 738–750.
- Linder SH, Peters BG. 1990a. Policy formulation and the challenge of conscious design. *Eval. Program Planning* **13**: 303–311.
- Linder SH, Peters BG. 1991. The logic of public policy design: linking policy actors and plausible instruments. *Knowledge in Society* **4**: 125–151.
- Linders, Dennis. "From E-government to We-government: defining a typology for citizen coproduction in the age of social media." *Government Information Quarterly*, Social Media in Government - Selections from the 12th Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research (dg.o2011), 29, no. 4 (2012): 446–54.
- Majone G. 1975. On the notion of political feasibility. *European Journal of Political Research* **3**(2): 259–274.
- Garcia Martinez M. 2015. Solver engagement in knowledge sharing in crowdsourcing communities: exploring the link to creativity. *Research Policy* **44**(8): 1419–1430.
- May PJ. 1981. Hints for crafting alternative policies. *Policy Analysis* **7**(2): 227–244.
- May P. 2003. Policy design and implementation. In *Handbook of Public Administration*, Peters BG, Pierre J (eds). Sage Publications: Beverly Hills; 223–233.
- Montpetit E. 2003. *Misplaced Distrust: Policy Networks and the Environment in France, the United States, and Canada*. UBC Press: Vancouver.
- Mucciaroni G. 1992. The garbage can model and the study of policymaking: a critique. *Polity* **24**(3): 460–482.
- Myles J. 1989. *Old Age in the Welfare State: The Political Economy of Public Pensions*. University Press of Kansas: Lawrence, Kan..
- Nelson R. 1977. *The Moon and the Ghetto: An Essay on Public Policy Analysis*. WW Norton: Chicago.
- Overbye E. 1994. Convergence in policy outcomes: social security systems in perspectives. *Journal of Public Policy* **14**(2): 147–174.
- Packwood A. 2002. Evidence-based policy: rhetoric and reality. *Social Policy & Society* **1**(3): 267–272.
- Ramesh M. 2008. Healthcare reforms in Thailand: rethinking conventional wisdom. In *Transforming Asian Governance*, Fritzen S, Ramesh M (eds). Routledge 2008.
- Rimlinger GV. 1971. *Welfare Policy and Industrialization in Europe, America and Russia*. Wiley: New York.
- Sager F, Rielle Y. 2013. Sorting through the garbage can: under what conditions do governments adopt policy programs? *Policy Sciences* **46**(1): 1–21. DOI:10.1007/s11077-012-9165-7.
- Salamon LM. 2002. *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*. Oxford University Press: New York.
- Schneider A, Sidney M. 2009. What is next for policy design and social construction theory? *Policy Studies Journal* **37**(1): 103–119.
- Schön DA. 1988. Designing: rules, types and words. *Design Studies* **9**(3): 181–190.
- Schön DA. 1992. Designing as reflective conversation with the materials of a design situation. *Knowledge-Based Systems* **5**(1): 3–14.
- Shalev M. 1983. The social democratic model and beyond: two generations of comparative research on the welfare state. *Comparative Social Research* **6**: 315–351.
- Sidney MS. 2007. Policy formulation: design and tools. In *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics and Methods*, Fischer F, Miller GJ, Sidney MS (eds). CRC Taylor & Francis: New Brunswick, N. J.; 79–87.
- Treisman D. 2007. What have we learned about the causes of corruption from ten years of cross-national empirical research? *Annual Review of Political Science* **10**: 211–244.
- Tribe LH. 1972. Policy science: analysis or ideology? *Philosophy and Public Affairs* **2**(1): 66–110.

- Weaver RK. 2009a. Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2009/09/30-compliance-weaver>. *Target Compliance: The Final Frontier of Policy Implementation*. Brookings Institution: Washington DC.
- Weaver RK. 2009b. *If You Build It, Will They Come? Overcoming Unforeseen Obstacles to Program Effectiveness*. THE TANSLEY LECTURE - University of Saskatchewan.
- Weaver K. 2010 Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2010/02/implementation-analysis-weaver>. *But Will It Work?: Implementation Analysis to Improve Government Performance*. Brookings Institution: Washington DC.
- Weaver RK. 2013n/a – n/a.. Compliance regimes and barriers to behavioral change. *Governance*. DOI:10.1111/gove.12032.
- Weaver RK. 2015n/a – n/a. Getting people to behave: research lessons for policy makers. *Public Administration Review*. DOI:10.1111/puar.12412.
- Weimer DL. 1992. The craft of policy design: can it be more than art? *Policy Studies Review* **11**(3/4): 370–388.
- Wintges R. 2007. *Monitoring and Analysis of Policies and Public Financing Instruments Conducive to Higher Levels of R&D Investments: The “Policy Mix” Project—Case Study: The Netherlands*. UNU-MERIT: Maastricht.
- Woo, J. J., M. Ramesh, and M. Howlett (2015) “Legitimation Capacity: System-level Resources and Political Skills in Public Policy”, *Policy and Society*, forthcoming.
- Wu X, Ramesh M. 2014. Market imperfections, government imperfections, and policy mixes: policy innovations in Singapore. *Policy Sciences*: 1–16.
- Wu, Xun, M. Ramesh, and M. Howlett. “Policy capacity: conceptual framework and measures.” *Policy & Society*, no. Fall (2015).
- Yi, Ilcheong. (2015). *New challenges for and new directions in social policy*. New York: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD).